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RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 January 2000]

GE.00-10644 (E)

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, 1999:
"A child in danger is a child that cannot wait"

1. Children and young people make up more than half the population of today's world; however, there is no guarantee of respect for their rights by the responsible authorities and even their own parents. Over 250 million child labourers are in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania. Almost 120 million of these working children are working full-time under appalling working conditions. Unfortunately, despite all the worldwide efforts, the number of child labourers is increasing.

2. Currently, there are more than 300,000 children under the age of 18 taking part in armed conflicts worldwide. These child soldiers are mainly between 15 and 18 years of age, yet children as young as 8 years can also be found among them. In the last decade alone, we have seen 2 million children killed, over 1 million orphaned, 6 million seriously injured or permanently disabled, 12 million made homeless and 10 million left with serious psychological trauma. On the eve of the new millennium we are witnessing an abomination directed against children in the context of armed conflict.

3. Over 130 million children, in particular in the third world and developing countries, are deprived of basic and meaningful education. In 1990, the world's Governments met at the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand. They promised that within a decade, all of the world's children would be provided with the opportunity to develop their full capacities. The promise included universal access to good-quality primary education and an end to gender inequalities. This was repeated at the World Summit for Children (1990), the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). All produced declarations and aims but have failed badly. If the world's Governments fail to act now, 75 million children will be deprived of basic education in 2015. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence calls for increased and improved aid for basic education for all children, all around the globe, and believes that the growing causes and effects of poverty require a global response.

4. Millions of young children die from malnutrition and easily curable diseases.

5. Prostitution and child trafficking is another major symbol of the violation of children's rights. The trafficked young children and, in particular, young girl children are forced to serve as prostitutes. These children, in addition to other dangers awaiting them, are very vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

6. The debts of the poor countries to the developing countries and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are also providing grounds for the violation of children's rights and, in particular, the right to education. Therefore, debt relief for the world's heavily indebted poor countries should also be a major task for the international bodies; otherwise, nearly 1 billion people worldwide will continue paying a heavy price for their Governments' debts to the World Bank and IMF. Along these lines, these debts should be cut to some payable levels and the countries that benefit from debt relief should be obliged to invest their savings in measures to reduce poverty and ensure that funds - freed up by debt relief - go to providing social services, including basic education and health care for children.

7. Imposing economic sanctions on a country above all brings more suffering upon the children, as the most vulnerable group living in that country.

8. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is considered to be the most comprehensive human rights treaty in history. The amazing point, however, is that except for two countries, Somalia and the United States, all the other States Members of the United Nations have signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence urges the responsible international bodies to put pressure on the remaining two countries that have not yet signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in particular the United States, to sign and to ratify the Convention.

9. No one can deny the important role of the international instruments on children's rights; however, what the international community should take into serious consideration is translating these words into deeds. It seems that the children in the world have been provided with enough papers and they are now looking for a real helping hand to drag them out from the depth of their miseries and bring them into the light of happiness. They cannot wait for the politicians to give several speeches on the betterment of the situation of human rights of children.

10. Anti-personnel mines are the world's cheapest and most indiscriminate soldiers. They live for decades after the war is over. There are approximately 110 million land mines lying undetected in the fields and alongside the roads and footpaths of more than 60 countries around the world. Every day and every night, almost 100 people, mostly children, are blown to bits by mines. In the past few decades, deaths and injuries from landmines have totalled in the hundreds of thousands. It should be noted that children are among the main victims of landmines. Child refugees - returning together with their parents to rebuild their lives in war-ravaged countries - are always very good targets for landmines. To put an end to the problem of landmines, the global ban on the use, transfer, production and stockpiling of such mines seems to be the best solution. Let's ask the biggest producers of landmines to sign and ratify the treaty to ban the use and production of landmines, since the landmines continue maiming and slaughtering children.

11. Light weapons and small arms are available in abundance, cheap to buy and require little training to use. This has led to their excessive use within societies and schoolchildren have been attracted to use them. It should be borne in mind that these guns are made for the death of human beings. It seems that, at least for the sake of children, the time has come to take decisive action to stop the spread and misuse of small arms and light weapons.

12. Islam is also against all forms of child exploitation, child abuse and violation of children's rights. These crimes are certainly punishable in the world of Islam. In spite of the fact that Islam regards children as "scents of heaven" and "gifts of God", and has asked for their rights to be respected and has offered them opportunities to get basic and meaningful education, we unfortunately see that certain States in the world of Islam, by resorting to some excuses, are ignoring children's rights. It is a sad fact that we witness trafficking in young girls and boys from the South-East Asian countries to certain countries in the Gulf region such as the United Arab Emirates, so as to be sent to the sex market in Europe.

13. The initiatives of the NGO and civil society sectors can be also regarded as a very significant contribution to ending the violation of the human rights of children. The Global March against Child Labour, the single largest social intervention in the world, can be mentioned as a good example. This march contributed to the final adoption of the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, at the 87th session of the International Labour Conference on 17 June 1999.

14. In the end, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence believes that it is time for the international community to come together and think seriously about the human rights situation of the world's next generation of decision-makers. At the threshold of the new millennium, the main priority for national and international action should be the total eradication of child labour, and in particular the worst and most intolerable forms of child labour; providing social services, health care and food for children in the less developed countries; providing free, relevant, accessible and meaningful education to all children. The protection of street children, the orphaned and abandoned children should also be taken into serious consideration.